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# The Answer Is Always Yes

by Monica Ferrell

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## About the Book

This darkly exuberant debut novel by turns a fierce, funny coming-of-age story and a teasing work of literary suspense traces the precipitous rise and fall of a teenage impresario at the zenith of the New York club scene.

Matthew Acciaccatura of Teaneck, New Jersey, begins his freshman year at NYU in the fall of 1995 with one goal in mind: to become cool. A former high school outcast, used to lumbering the hallways alone in oversize turtle-necks, Matt seems an unlikely candidate for such a transformation. Yet by dint of effort he lands the coveted position of promoter at one of the hottest clubs in New York in the heyday of rave music and Ecstasy. However, as "Magic" Matt rises to fame, portents of tragedy begin to appear, literally in the margins of the story. Footnotes from one Dr. Hans Mannheim, an imprisoned German academic obsessed with Matt's dangerous trajectory, suggest that Matt is not as in control of his destiny as he might appear.

A gorgeously written archetypal tale of self-discovery (and self-deception) and a love letter to the enduring possibilities of New York City, **The Answer Is Always Yes** will keep readers guessing until its explosive climax.

## Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel's title. How does "yes" function for the characters? What does it mean to say "yes" to anything? How did Matt respond to "no" when he was growing up in Teaneck?
2. How would you describe the friendship between Matt and Jason? How does the dynamic change when Sophie is added to the mix?
3. In chapter nine, Vic Spector tries to get Matt to admit why he's really at the club. What do you think Matt wants from the club scene? What do Matt and Vic expect from each other? Do promoters exploit club kids, or are the promoters the

ones who are actually getting exploited?

4. What is the effect of the "research" projects that frame the novel, including not only Dr. Mannheim's reports but also the notes from researcher M.F., introducing and closing **The Answer Is Always Yes**? How did your attitude toward Dr. Mannheim shift while you read his commentary? Did you trust him?

5. How do the characters experience one another on Ecstasy? Without it, how do they feel about themselves and their lives?

6. Who has the upper hand in Matt and Sophie's relationship? in love, in bed, and otherwise? What is the nature of their attraction for each other?

7. How does the author balance the tragicomic aspects of Matt's story? Which parts of **The Answer Is Always Yes** entertained you the most? Which scenes were the most startling?

8. What was your reaction to Matt's mother? How did she influence Matt's decisions as he reinvented himself in Manhattan?

9. How does NYU, along with its surrounding neighborhoods, form an appropriate backdrop for the novel?

10. What would Lisanne think of Dr. Mannheim's depictions of her? How does the story of their marriage compare to the scenes of other lovers in the book? Does Dr. Mannheim see the world accurately?

11. Did you read the novel as a satire? If so, who is being satirized? Do any of the allusions remind you of people you know?

12. In his "Chronological Gloss," between the fourth and fifth chapters of part two, and again in another "Chronological Gloss" between the third and fourth chapters of part three, Dr. Mannheim provides historical data for the years 1995 and 1996. What makes these years ideal for the story of Matthew Acciaccatura? What details does Monica Ferrell include to capture that particular moment in New York lore? Is the cultural climate of New York (and America) so very different in the twenty-first century?

13. Is Katie Ford's father solely responsible for the violence in the closing chapter? Was Dr. Mannheim's incarceration, followed by probation, an appropriate punishment?

14. How did you react to the final image from Dr. Mannheim, in which Sophie dances to the suave words of Irving Berlin? How will she remember this chapter of her life?

15. What did "cool" mean to Matt? What does it mean to most people? What was the source of Matt's magical rise to fame at Cinema?

16. Did you reinvent yourself in college? In the transition years of late teens and early twenties, what is revealed: your true self, or a false, derivative self that eventually gets abandoned?

## Author Bio

Monica Ferrell's poems have appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, *Paris Review*, and other magazines. A former *Discovery* the Nation winner and Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, she lives in Brooklyn. This is her first novel.

## Critical Praise

"From the smoke and mirrors of the New York club scene emerges Magic Matt, the Jay Gatsby of his generation. This painfully unpopular young man's fierce determination to reinvent himself as the hippest kid at NYU is, by turns, darkly comic and profoundly tragic. **The Answer Is Always Yes** is a stellar coming-of-age novel with a nifty, sinister postmodern twist. And it's a terrific read; an eloquent page-turner. How's that for some kind of wonderful?"

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